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SUBJECT: UNIVERSITY OF BAGHDAD - CLASS OF 2008

11. (U) Summary: University of Baghdad (UB) President Dr. Mosa Aziz Al-Mosawa exulted at the success of the 2008 academic year during a June 15 meeting with Poloff. UB is at full capacity, with 70,000 undergraduate students and 10,000 graduate students. July 15 will mark the end of the UB academic year, with approximately 9,000 students graduating (8,000 undergraduates and 1,000 graduates). Al-Mosawa cited the university administration's emphasis on security as the main reason why campus life is calm. The university enforces a strict secular and no-politics-on-campus policy; as a result, no political party or religious group wields influence on UB's curriculum, students or faculty. Student applications are up Iraq wide and, according to Al-Mosawa, unlike many other educated professions, notably doctors, university teaching staff have remained in Iraq despite civil strife and continue to work. End Summary.

12. (U) Al-Mosawa boasted that the University of Baghdad is one of the oldest and most prestigious universities in the region. This October the Law College will celebrate its centennial. UB has 70,000 undergraduate students, 10,000 graduate students, twenty-four colleges, five institutes and ten research centers, spread over many locations throughout Baghdad. Its teaching staff numbers 8,000 and makes up 42% of the country's total. For families who wish, UB also offers six women-only colleges. The Ministry of Education administers the admissions process and students who are accepted attend tuition free -- much to the chagrin of the University President, who feels that the students would have a better work ethic if they (their parents) were paying for school. 15%-20% of the student body hails from outside of Baghdad.

13. (U) The University of Baghdad's medical program generates the greatest demand among students. The six year program is the only degree that guarantees employment through the Ministry of Health. This year 350 students are expected to graduate. (Note: There are estimates that 12,000 Iraqi doctors fled the country, decimating the nation's health care system. End Note)

14. (U) BU's engineering program, traditionally prestigious in Iraq, is one of the school's largest, followed by other sciences. Al-Mosawa explained that lectures in these topics are conducted in Arabic, but textbooks and notes are in English. (Note: Until the 80's, the engineering program was taught entirely in English. End Note) In the past, the Ministry of Planning would employ engineering graduates, but that is no longer the case and students now must seek employment on their own. BU President estimates that from this year's 1,000 engineering graduates, only 30%-40% will find work in their field. UB offers many fields of study, including a linguistics department with ten languages) English being the most popular with French coming in second; there are also 15 students studying Hebrew, he remarked.

15. (U) University of Baghdad's main campus is quiet and gives the impression of being insulated from the hustle and bustle of the city, but in reality this requires constant vigilance on behalf of the school. The administration places a high priority on security, hiring and training its own

guard force, Al-Mosawa explained (Note: Security at other campuses is less certain and recently the Vice President of Nahrain University was assassinated. End Note). Moreover, student political activities or organizations are prohibited on campus. Political party representatives may speak at the university, but only on issues that pertain to Iraq as a whole. The administration has come under some pressure to authorize religious ceremonies, but it continues to maintain its secular standing, he stressed. When asked if any political party, militia or religious group had ever tried to coerce the UB President or teaching staff, Dr. Mosa seemed surprised by the question and responded, "How could they? We follow the curriculum set forth by the Ministry of Education."

16. (U) The University of Baghdad confronts the same challenges as the rest of Iraq. Years of Saddam's oppressive regime, sanctions, a decade of isolation, and other regime change related strife have left the university's faculties in desperate need of modernization. Some of UB President Dr. Mosa's key concerns are the poor condition of its 13 dormitory buildings that house 6,000 students, the lack of computers for professors, the need for international scholarships and greater cooperation with foreign universities.

17. (U) Comment: As a barometer for Iraq's future, University of Baghdad's Class of 2008 signals a step towards normalcy. In a secure environment, away from the noise of politicking and free from the influence of malign actors, Iraqi students show a strong interest in professional careers as doctors, engineers or scientists, while still possessing a

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broader appreciation for languages, history and literature. While UB graduates face an uncertain job market and the university needs to improve its infrastructure, the students' achievements augur well for a future burgeoning middle class.
End Comment.

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